

Telling Missouri's Public Health Stories



Columbia Commits to Clean Air in Public Housing

In December 2016, the Office of Public and Indian Housing (PIH) recognized the health impact and economic benefit of eliminating second-hand smoke in public housing and finalized the Smoke-Free Public Housing Rule. Public housing authorities had until July 31, 2018 to implement smoke-free policies in all public housing. While this may have caught some people by surprise, residents in Columbia, Missouri were prepared for the change, thanks to a proactive partnership among local public health system partners.

Long before the rule became effective, the Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services (PHHS) proactively partnered with the Columbia Housing Authority on a project to reduce smoking in public housing in Columbia. They started with a pilot project at Oak and Paquin Towers, two high-rise units.

Linda Cooperstock was the public health planner for PHHS at the time. She says they received a two-year grant from Missouri Foundation for Health to address tobacco cessation and reached out to their public health system partners. The grant provided training to a number of community professionals in tobacco cessation services, including nurses, medical students and public health staff. Columbia Housing Authority management actively promoted smoking cessation and recruited residents to participate in the program. PHSS provided nicotine replacement and counseling, and together the partners offered a regular schedule of education and activities at the Towers that were focused around reducing smoking.



Oak Towers, Columbia, Missouri

Photo source: Columbia Housing Authority



Your apartment can't be smoke-free if your building isn't.

Even though you may not see it, secondhand smoke and its deadly chemicals move between apartments. Learn how to make your building smoke-free. Call 311 or visit nyc.gov/health and search "smoke-free housing".



Office of the Mayor
Marcy 1, Queens, NY 11384
Commissioner

"It was a slow process, slow to get started," says Cooperstock. "It seemed that many of the residents who smoked were not motivated to quit for their health. Housing Authority management was supportive of putting in a smoke-free policy," adds Cooperstock, "but at the time, the only incentives [to quit] were self and peer pressure."

However, residents did want clean air. PHHS conducted an air quality study inside the building and shared the results with residents. PHSS staff talked about the health impact of secondhand smoke, the fire risk created by smoking and the benefits of clean air. They held smoking cessation classes onsite. They hosted card games and guest lectures. They showed movies and provided entertainment, always with smoking cessation intertwined.

April Steffensmeier was the Resident Services Coordinator at Columbia Housing Authority and worked with Cooperstock on the pilot program. “We included the residents in the dialogue from the beginning. ‘What do you want it to look like?’ The Towers residents chose to put in an outdoor smoking place – not something we envisioned, but it worked for them.”

Steffensmeier says staff looked at what smokers considered to be positive things about smoking, like relaxing and visiting with friends and asked, “How can you get the same feelings with different activities?” She adds, “We tried to focus less on the negative impacts of smoking,” she adds. “They know that. Instead we looked at the positive aspects, or harm reduction – cutting down – and how it benefits health.”

Cooperstock believes their outreach project helped people more easily accept smoke-free policy changes that followed. “The early cessation program's success was informing the residents about how to quit, and planting the seed. Then when the idea of the smoke-free housing policy was introduced to them, they actually worked together with management to come up with reasonable accommodations, rather than fight the policy.”

Steffensmeier attributes the success to their partnership with PHHS. “We had a strong start with Linda,” she says. “She laid the groundwork and visualized how it would go. Air quality is better now, and non-smokers are very happy. They enjoy their clean air environment.”

The Housing Authority continues to enforce smoking bans inside public housing and within 20 feet of entrances. They depend on their ongoing partnership with PHHS, referring their residents to PHHS staff for smoking cessation education and resources.

Michelle Shikles now manages the tobacco control program as Public Health Promotion Supervisor at PHHS. She says the smoke-free public housing program was just one part of a multi-year effort to reduce smoking in Columbia. Today PHHS works actively with employers on smoking cessation education through worksite wellness programs. PHHS offers a walk-in clinic to support individuals who are ready to quit. It restricts tobacco purchases for youth under 21 years old through a Tobacco 21 ordinance. Columbia is also working to develop a local Tobacco Retail License policy, patterned after the St. Louis model.

“Tobacco retail licenses are common,” Shikles says. “Most states have a statewide license. You have to get creative in Missouri. Our tobacco sales tax is so low and no tobacco legislation is moving at the state, so you have to be creative locally.”



She encourages Missouri communities with limited resources to focus their efforts on policies that support prevention, because they have a broadly effective impact on tobacco rates.

Local partnerships are also key. The Public Health 3.0 model urges local public health agencies to act as the “Chief Health Strategist” in their communities, pulling together individuals and organizations to build a strong public health system that

collaborates to ensure the conditions in which everyone can be healthy.

“Smoking is still the number one cause of preventable death,” says Shikles, “so we need to do whatever we can, first of all in prevention and then helping them quit to improve quality of life.”

NOTE: The Office of Public and Indian Housing (PIH) is an agency of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Its mission is to ensure safe, decent, and affordable housing, create opportunities for residents' self-sufficiency and economic independence, and assure the fiscal integrity of all program participants. To learn more about the Smoke-Free Public Housing Rule, visit <https://www.hud.gov/smokefreepublichousing>.

The #HealthierMO initiative is seeking more stories like this one that demonstrate how partners in Missouri’s greater public health system are working together to transform the future of public health in our state and offer every resident the opportunity for a healthier life. If you have a story to share, message us on Facebook @HealthierMO or email Communications Coordinator Jaci McReynolds at jmcreynolds@healthiermo.org. Learn more about the initiative and how you can get involved at HealthierMO.org or on Facebook @[HealthierMO](https://www.facebook.com/HealthierMO).